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Talking Points on Lebanon for the DDCI
Current Situation: Israeli-Lebanese Options
(As of 1200 EDT, 29 August 1983)

Situation Update in Beirut and Environs

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After the Gemayel Government ordered the Lebanese Army to freeze all military operations in the southern suburbs of Beirut, fighting resumed between the Army and the Shia Amal militia, according to Beirut Domestic radio.

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The Lebanese Cabinet is in special session and Beirut Domestic reports government officials are in contact with Shia and Sunni religious leaders, presumably to calm the situation in Beirut. [REDACTED]

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The LAF airbase at Riyaq in the northern Bekaa Valley is under artillery attack, presumably from Syrian forces. [REDACTED]

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Gemayel's Diminishing Options

Lebanese President Gemayel's decision to use Army units to disarm Shia Amal militiamen in Beirut's southern suburbs was a reckless move born out of desperation. Previous Lebanese Army/Shia confrontations in West Beirut had been defused because the Army had exercised restraint. Some Lebanese officials, however, were critical of the Army's failure to respond forcefully, and this time Gemayel apparently wanted to project a tough image in response to the fighting Sunday between Amal and Lebanese Army units. []

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The large-scale commitment of Army forces against Muslims, coming only two days after the President went on national television preaching reconciliation, will only reinforce the public's perception of Gemayel as an increasingly [] desperate leader.

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- If Gemayel's one attempt to be tough backfires, the President, who believes his range of options is quickly diminishing, is likely to become further demoralized.
- We doubt that Gemayel has the ability or will to engage in significant policy initiatives, even at the behest of the United States. []

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Nevertheless, Gemayel's first task will be to reestablish government authority over Beirut. Although Lebanese security officials report that the Army performed well against the Amal militia in the southern suburbs, the Army offensive precipitated attacks by various Muslim and Druze forces against Army positions elsewhere in the city. The Army has apparently lost control of some sections of the city.

- Gemayel needs to regain government control over these areas, but sudden Army moves against the militias almost certainly will precipitate renewed factional fighting throughout the city.
- The Lebanese Government almost certainly will ask the MNF to assist the Army, but MNF involvement will only strengthen Muslim and Druze suspicions that the MNF--particularly the US contingent--is supporting Gemayel's campaign to destroy opposition forces. []

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To restore order, Gemayel needs a political understanding with the various militia heads, particularly Shia leader Nabih Barri. Barri, who has been ambivalent in his attitude toward Gemayel, may still want to reach an understanding with the government.

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- Barri had been in contact with government officials before Gemayel's decision to authorize the Army sweep into Shia areas.
- He will perceive the government's actions today, however, as a stab-in-the-back, and he may temporarily forsake any discussions with Gemayel.
- In addition, this week is a particularly emotional one for Shias. August 31st marks the fifth anniversary of the disappearance of their most important religious leader--Iman Musa Sadr--and Amal radicals will urge Barri to take further actions against the government. []

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If Gemayel cannot reimpose a semblance of stability in Beirut, then the question of Lebanese Army deployment in the Shuf and Alayh districts becomes academic. At least one of the Army units active in the Beirut sweep was scheduled to replace the withdrawing Israelis. We doubt that the Army will be able to maintain order in Beirut and, at the same time, deploy to the Shuf and Alayh.

- President Gemayel recognizes the need to reach an agreement with Druze leader Junblatt, but the rapid Druze intervention in today's fighting will reinforce Gemayel's conviction that Junblatt cannot be trusted.
- We do not believe that a Gemayel/Junblatt agreement is in the cards any time soon. []

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The Phalange-dominated Lebanese Forces militia will almost certainly deploy in force today throughout East Beirut. Lebanese Forces commanders and Phalange leader Pierre Gemayel will advise the President not to compromise with the Muslim militia leaders, particularly not after their attacks today against government authority.

- Lebanese Forces' ability to operate unencumbered in East Beirut will further antagonize Muslims and Druze.
- If the Beirut situation continues to deteriorate, Gemayel probably will side with the Christian Lebanese Forces. He will pay lipservice to the idea of national reconciliation, primarily to retain badly needed US support. []

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Lebanese Army Capabilities

In the last 24 hours, the Lebanese Army's Fourth, Sixth, and Eighth Brigades have been committed to operations against the Shia Amal militias in South Beirut. In addition, three battalions and elements of the Lebanese Army airmobile units have been deployed. [REDACTED]

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- The Fourth Brigade is the least capable of the Army's deployable brigades.
- The Sixth Brigade has been responsible for security in Beirut.
- The Eighth Brigade is the Army's crack unit and was slated to go into the northern Shuf region following Israeli deployment.
- Only two of the three battalions planned for Lebanon's airmobile brigade have been formed and they comprise the Army's quick reaction force. [REDACTED]

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In the event renewed fighting breaks out between Muslim militias and Lebanese Army units in South Beirut, Army Commander Tannous probably will decide against sending additional troops in the Shuf. Simultaneous commitments of Lebanese Army units to heavy fighting in Beirut and in the mountainous Shuf region would severely strain the capabilities of the Army, which was ill-prepared for its intended mission in the Shuf even before this latest outbreak of fighting in the city. [REDACTED]

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Begin's Reaction to a Request to Delay Withdrawal

In the absence of a firm political agreement between the Lebanese government and the various factions fighting in the Shuf, we believe Begin would reject a US request to delay the redeployment.

- Public opinion is running strongly against further delays. Over the weekend, three leading newspapers carried editorials calling on the government to start the withdrawal quickly. While Begin has not said publicly when he plans to start the redeployment, most Israelis expect it to begin shortly, and the government would be hardpressed to explain a delay beyond this week. []

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The military leadership is also urging Begin to start the redeployment without delay. Senior officers told Arens last week that any further delay would mean more casualties.

- The violence this weekend is likely to reinforce that argument. The military will argue that any further Israeli military involvement in the Shuf will, in view of the breakdown in the security situation, only lead to more Israeli deaths. []

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We do not believe the turmoil surrounding Begin's announcement of his intention to retire will effect the decision.

- Many cabinet officials are urging that the move start shortly and the defense ministry announced yesterday that plans for the redeployment would not be effected by Begin's announcement. []

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A direct request from President Gemayel, coupled with an announcement that he was willing to meet publicly with senior Israeli officials, might cause Begin to consider a short delay.

- The Israelis are increasingly sceptical of Beirut's intentions and have clearly lost faith in Gemayel's willingness to implement the Israeli-Lebanese accord. An agreement by Gemayel to meet publicly with Arens or Shamir might change this perception.
- If the Lebanese government does not act and the redeployment goes ahead, we believe the Israelis will focus their efforts on reaching agreements with various factions in south Lebanon. [] indicate they have already been in contact with a number of factions there. []

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